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Sensitivity training, a teaching-learning experience, is a group process consisting of continual interaction experiences which can effect behavior change through self-understanding in participants. Feedback is the most important element in effecting behavior change and can be expressed through two techniques: verbal, used to sensitize the participant toward focusing on the present and articulating the difference between intellectualizing and expressing feeling (such as role playing, self-description analysis, and questioning); and nonverbal used to achieve authentic and spontaneous expression of feelings (such as touch communication). Sensitivity training has been integrated into the learning experiences for teacher education at Lehman College on both the undergraduate and graduate levels to produce teachers who will be able to understand and express themselves effectively. (SM)

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SENSITIVITY TRAINING IN TEACHER EDUCATION

by MARY RITA D. O'HARE

A new and potent teaching-learning experience, currently included sporadically and controversially in some teacher education programs, is called by many names—sensitivity training, laboratory training, T-groups (Training Groups), D-Groups (Diagnostic Groups), Encounter Groups, group dynamics or group process experiences.

Despite at least twenty years of extensive research and documentation in the inter-disciplinary field of group dynamics, it is still difficult to explain what this teaching-learning experience is, and almost impossible to describe what happens to participants in such an experience. To know what sensitivity training is, one must have the experience, which might be characterized as one that frees people to express their emotions, to examine the meaning of these emotions in terms of themselves and others, and to integrate the expression of emotion into their everyday life experiences.

Reading about sensitivity training cannot be a substitute for the lived experience because it involves another way of learning or knowing. It seems contradictory, but this experience also enables people to be objective about themselves and others in terms of the research and knowledge modern man has accumulated about human behavior. It is possible to say that sensitivity training deals with two ways in which man can know reality; intellectually or abstractly, and emotionally or concretely. Teachers are experienced in knowing their world and children in intellectual or abstract ways. Where a child lives, how tall he is, what his reading score is, are the kinds of abstract knowledge a teacher depends upon, while, really, who the child is and how he feels about himself and others is the key to knowing him. The impossible myth of modern educational dicta is that a child's learning depends upon his being understood by the teacher. Experience in a sensitivity training group quickly reveals to teachers how complex and difficult it is to understand themselves, much less the children they live with for five hours a day.

Paradoxically, sensitivity training will become a household phrase as schools begin to engage more extensively in these group experiences for faculty and students. In fact, some parent groups in ghetto areas are already asking that teachers have such group experiences before teaching their children.

What is the magic of the sensitivity training group? A voluminous literature from the behavioral sciences related to the group, and, in turn, to the sensitivity training group, has been developing since the 1930's. The fields of sociology, psychology, social psychology, psychoanalysis, psychiatry, anthropology and education have examined the influence of the group and the processes occurring within it in shaping the needs, attitudes, beliefs and actions of individuals. Attention has focused on the study of "group process" which refers to the responses and reactions of persons to each other in face-to-face relationships. Different behavioral disciplines, with their characteristic research techniques, have examined the processes of dynamic human interaction occurring within and between groups regardless of where they exist, and these interdisciplinary findings have coalesced into the new field of group dynamics. This field is concerned with group life: the possibility of directing social change; group influence, cohesion, and decision-making; controlling behavior, changing attitudes, and the reaching of common decisions and intimacy.

Studies have revealed many parallels between individual and group functioning as well as how groups develop, face stress, make adjustive responses, move ahead, or disintegrate. Imitation, cooperation, competition, conflict and other factors involved in group interaction processes have also been studied.

Studies of leadership in 1939 led to a breakthrough in the application of knowledge about group processes. Kurt Lewin and his associates investigated the effects of social climates on three groups of ten-year old boys organized in groups along authoritarian, democratic and "laissez-faire" patterns of leadership. They demonstrated that an authoritarian atmosphere, where policies and activities were determined by the leader, impaired the initiative and independence of the boys who subsequently became hostile and aggressive.

As a result of the psychological theories and investigations of Lewin and his associates, and guided by the philosophy of the National Education Association, the first National Training Laboratory on Group Development was founded at Bethel, Maine, in 1947 as a yearly summer session. Since that time, the National Training Laboratories have grown at a phenomenal rate and have branched out into providing laboratory experiences for people in all facets of American professional life.

What is this mysterious, elusive and sometimes miraculous sensitivity training? It is a new way of learning which occurs when a group of people examine the meaning of "group", its processes and development.

The "group" is like the air around us. It is a natural phenomenon, so pervasive in its effects on human beings that we are usually unaware of, or ignore, the processes which occur within all groups and which constantly affect member behavior. For example, pressures of a group and within a group can bring about positive or negative modification of member behavior; a group gives members psychological support for action and provides safety for entering into conflict either within or outside the group. It might be said that the group is the medium. For what? For

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change and growth in personal behavior.

Group, as a medium, refers to the face-to-face, interactive and intersubjective reality between two or more persons, aware of, and affecting, each other. Group processes can be described as the continual interaction between persons, always acting as individuals in a group, with each encounter or experience capable of effecting change in the participants. It implies a structure (a group, in this instance) changing over a period of time. This process, the actual concrete behaviors of individual members of the group, is the *content* and can be considered as a structure dependent on the past and present experiences of the members but always unique. It is *how* things are happening rather than *what* is being talked about. Regardless of what the group discusses, certain processes, basic to all groups, are occurring.

How does a sensitivity training experience happen? Generally, there is a group of ten to sixteen people who meet on either a regular weekly or biweekly basis, or on an intensive weekend or day experience with what is currently called a "trainer", who serves as a catalyst in the development of the group.

What the trainer in a group does to help the group develop depends upon his or her personal makeup and professional orientation and preparation, but the key action generally is to relinquish the traditional role of leadership. This may be done by remaining silent in early sessions of the group's life, but trying to respond openly and honestly to any approaches by members of the group. It might be described as being actively passive in what McLuhan calls a "detached involvement".

The trainer may be the one to help the group to focus on "feedback" when that occurs. Feedback describes a process whereby a person or group gets information about his or her respective behavior in the group setting. One person tells another how he perceives or "sees" him. For example, a member of a group *describes* another's behavior as angry or attacking, or as making them feel uncomfortable. The person can then examine the validity and meaning of the observation as related to the actual feelings experienced and the dynamics of the personal encounter. Other group members can give insight, support, interpretation, negation or confirmation to the encounter. The dialogue which occurs helps deepen awareness of who one is, and how one really feels towards himself and towards others. Real feelings are not as hidden as we like to think! In the sensitivity group a person can look at his own behavior in open, non-defensive ways, recognizing his honest feelings about himself and others, and the concomitant effects. Feedback is a mirroring process which has unlimited possibilities for sparking true personal dialogue between people and enhancing and deepening the meaning of everyday experience.

Various verbal and non-verbal techniques are used in a group process experience to help free group members to feel and express emotion, and to conceptualize about emotion—to raise unconscious feeling to the level of consciousness. These techniques involve taking everyday, familiar experience, and through a common group experience, making it uncommon and unfamiliar so as to gain insight into the realities of personal relationships. Verbal techniques would include such experiences as role-playing, self-description analysis, and questioning.

In role-playing, group members spontaneously act out roles of others in a problem situation to give the players an opportunity to feel like another, thereby gaining insight into another's feelings as well as their own. Self-description analysis can be written anonymously as to how a friend or an enemy would view one, and then discussed in the group where such human phenomena as identification process, impersonalistic feelings about self, and spontaneity and authenticity can merge in the subsequent dialogue. Such questions as: "Ask someone in the group a question that will help you to know him better"; "Which person do you feel closest to in the group?"; "Which person do you feel most distant from?"; and questions such as, "Are we a group?"; "Is everyone here a member of the group?"; "What is the group doing to help people to become members of the group?"; "What is the group or its individuals doing to keep the group from moving or to prevent a person from coming into the group?" help the group focus on "here and now" as opposed to "back home" or "there and then", and serve to highlight the difference between intellectualizing and expressing feeling.

Non-verbal techniques are being used increasingly in groups to achieve authentic and spontaneous expressions of feelings from group members. They enable group members to find how insensitive they are to themselves as physical entities as well as how insensitive they may be to others emotionally or physically. One non-verbal technique might be to have one group member voluntarily stand in the center of the room and have other members touch him in such a way as to communicate with him. In this experience the person standing in the middle experiences the gamut of feelings—warmth, anger, hostility, sympathy.

Openness and honesty in a group is usually the source of building a trust level where people can really express what they feel. Resonance of feeling has a miraculous quality in that it frees the person to be authentic while giving support and understanding. It is really the group that builds a climate in which the risk of more intimate personal relations can be taken. It is important to note that personal investment in a group is impossible unless the group has developed to a point of openness and support, which only happens when group members run the risk of personal investment. It is in this sense that a group is a medium in which change can take place.

A sensitivity training experience is a million light years more than an exchange of words, ideas, or abstractions; it really has to do with such things as neurological exchange of human energies, physical and non-phys-

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ical properties of people, and many as yet unknown dimensions of human experience having to do with communication. It is concerned with discovering and exploring the meaning of what happens when persons really encounter each other.

At Lehman College, the formal incorporation of sensitivity in the teacher education sequence occurs primarily in the second half of the course, Psychological Foundations: Parts I and II, and in the programs of the Educational Clinic. In this course, students have the opportunity to combine field experience with theoretical work. Part I of the course is concerned with child and adolescent behavior and personality development, and students not only make informal observations of children in schools but can become a Big Brother or Sister to one of the children. Part II examines the contributions of the behavioral sciences which are pertinent to classroom teaching, including learning theories, methods of evaluation and measurement and group processes.

On the undergraduate level, the Educational Clinic has been experimenting with providing variations of sensitivity training groups not only for students in the Psychological Foundations course, but for students who are tutoring pupils in the public schools as part of their Methods courses. One experimental approach has had a group of students who work with a classroom group, return to a group in the clinic to examine this experience. Personnel in the Clinic also provide group experiences for teachers currently in service in the schools. They have also worked with children's groups in one school. Two groups of ten children each met once a week through two semesters, with a member of the Clinic staff and the corrective reading teacher from the school, to explore the children's learning difficulties and school problems. In another school, a small group of "fighters" has met weekly with a member of the Clinic staff to explore their aggressive behavior.

On the graduate level, an experiment involved having one class visit another class to have what is called a micro-laboratory experience. One group observed the relationships and group processes of the other, and after ten minutes gave the observed group a feedback on process. In the course of the experience, the respective "teachers" of each group were given feedback about their teaching styles and relationships with students, and such group phenomena as competition, authority and leadership were examined.

Sensitivity training was included among the means of supporting first-year teachers in schools in disadvantaged communities in a project sponsored jointly by Hunter College and the Center for Urban Education in order to reduce the rate of teacher dropout.

It was suggested to principals, assistant principals and teacher trainers that a sensitivity training group experience be offered to all first-year teachers on a school-wide basis as well as to the personnel involved in their orientation to the school. This sensitivity training group, which took place during lunch hour twice a week for a year in a public elementary school, consisted of a trainer (college professor), eight first-year teachers, one second-year teacher, and two experienced teachers assigned as mentors to the first year teachers. There were three five-hour sessions outside of school.

I suggest that in the future, sensitivity training will place more emphasis on the ways in which teachers, as "people", can be helped, not only to cope with current conditions in schools but also to become agents of change within them. This requires "new" teachers who first know their own feelings, are able to examine and understand them more deeply, and to express them in more adequate, wholehearted and spontaneous ways.

Editor's Note: Bibliography available on request to Division of Teacher Education.